

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Nebraska?

There was no objection.

Mr. OSBORNE. Madam Speaker, the Iraqis voted today, and it is estimated that approximately 10 million of 15 eligible voters did vote. Women voted in record numbers. The Sunnis participated in large numbers for the first time. The vote completes the political process in Iraq.

Last January, they elected an assembly to draft a constitution. In August, the constitution was completed. In October, the constitution was approved by a large margin, about 70 percent of the voters. Now a new government is elected, and this was all done today with relatively little violence as the Iraqis went to the polls.

There is some other news that I think is positive as well: School attendance in Iraq is up by as much as 80 percent; 774 schools have been built or renovated; 36,000 teachers have been trained; and 142 health care facilities have been built or are under construction. Nearly all young Iraqis have been vaccinated for the first time. Satellite dishes, newspapers, TV stations and small businesses are developing and springing up, and 211,000 Iraqi troops have been trained and equipped.

Still, there are many who say that there is no progress in Iraq, and I would like to reflect on some comments from a young soldier from Nebraska that I met in a recent trip to the Middle East who said this. He said it is important that we finish the job there and not pull out prematurely because, if we do leave early, three things will happen.

Number one, thousands of Iraqis will die, and we have promised them we would not abandon them, and so we will break a promise.

Secondly, we will encourage more terrorism worldwide and in the U.S. as well. It would inform the terrorists that terrorism does work.

And lastly, 2,000-plus soldiers would have died in vain. I think this is an important point to consider. As I have talked to parents of soldiers who have died, this is something that they do not want to have happen. There was a letter distributed today by Congressman JEFF MILLER from Bud Clay, and it was written to President Bush upon the death of his son, Staff Sergeant Daniel Clay in Iraq. This is what Mr. Clay wrote to President Bush, and I quote, he said, "We and many others are praying for you to see this through. As Lincoln said, 'that these might not have died in vain.'"

Included in the letter from Mr. Clay was a letter from his son, and this letter was written if he should happen to be killed in combat, and it was written to his family.

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And this is what Daniel Clay said. He said, what we have done in Iraq is worth any sacrifice. Why? Because it

was our duty. That sounds simple, but all of us have a duty. Duty is defined as a God-given task. Without duty, life is worthless. It holds no type of fulfillment. The simple fact that our bodies are built for work has to lead us to the conclusion that God who made us put us together to do His work. And then he goes on, finally he says, I know what honor is. It is not a word to be thrown around. It has been an honor to protect and serve all of you, meaning his family. I faced death with the secure knowledge that you would not have to. This is as close to Christ-likeness as I can be. That emulation is where all honor lives. I thank you for making it worthwhile.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. SCHMIDT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. TAYLOR of Mississippi addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extension of Remarks.)

SAVING FOR A RAINY DAY

Mr. SCHIFF. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak out of turn.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. SCHIFF) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCHIFF. Madam Speaker, the poet Longfellow once wrote: "Thy fate is the common fate of all; into each life some rain must fall." How true this is.

We know that calamities will come to our Nation. We know that terrorists are trying to attack us again and that Osama bin Laden wants to strike us with weapons of mass destruction. We know that in years to come hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, and other natural disasters will devastate our shores, our towns, our homes, and most terrible, our very lives.

We must prepare, not only with a strong military and good infrastructure but also with a reserve of funds to cushion the impact to our economy and to meet the needs of the victims. Part of being prepared is doing what many families know as saving for a rainy day.

America has seen both prosperity and depressions, periods of unbridled growth and periods of stubborn stagnation. We have seen strong budget surpluses and huge budget deficits.

While any economy has periodic cycles of expansion and contraction, we know that fiscally irresponsible policies of an administration or a Congress can abbreviate an upturn or prolong a downturn.

Today, a lack of revenue, uncontrolled spending and faulty planning

have put our national debt so high that putting our fiscal house in order seems out of reach. I am here to tell you that it is not out of reach. It will take time, but it is possible and it must be done.

The Blue Dog Coalition has put together a comprehensive 12-point plan to make needed reforms to our budget process, and one of these critical reforms is the creation of a rainy-day fund to set aside money for good times to pay for disasters, which we know will eventually come.

Madam Speaker, as you know, unlike the Federal Government, States must balance their budgets each year. In tough times States must raise revenue or cut spending. And generally, they cannot put these decisions off for another year or another generation. But many States have been resourceful. Forty-five of them, including my own home State of California, have created their own rainy-day funds. These funds are still small, too small and the States are in poor fiscal health. But they have begun the process of planning for their own rainy days.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, since 2001, States have used around \$30 billion from their rainy-day funds and general fund balances to help offset more than \$250 billion in deficits.

Even during these weak economic times, States must continue to maintain and grow the viability of their rainy-day funds. In California we understand only too well that an earthquake, wildfire, or other calamity can strike our State without notice; and these funds will be crucial to helping Californians deal with the crisis.

The Federal Government must also be prepared for the Nation's next crisis; but, sadly, we are not. Even today, this Congress struggles with the unprecedented task of rebuilding the gulf coast after the worst natural disaster in our Nation's history.

Because the Federal Government failed to make the proper investment into the levees protecting New Orleans, one of our prized cities now lies in ruins. If we had had the foresight to establish a national rainy-day fund prior to Katrina, immediate fiscal decisions of this Congress could have been so much less painful, the cuts so much less devastating, and we would not have to go so far deeper into debt to come to the aid of our fellow citizens.

Imagine also that if Congress properly invested each year into the rainy-day fund, the interest from this fund could be used to make needed infrastructure improvements, the same type of improvements that could have saved the city of New Orleans from such devastating flooding.

Congress has so far provided more than \$62 billion in emergency funds to respond to Hurricane Katrina, but we know that so much more will be needed. So much more was spent after September 11 and still our Nation's needs are not met.

Let us do what we encourage all of our children to do and save for the future. I encourage this Congress to take a strong look at the Blue Dogs' 12-point plan and establish a rainy-day fund.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURGESS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

A REMARKABLE DAY IN IRAQ

Mr. HAYES. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take the time of the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BURGESS).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from North Carolina?

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. HAYES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HAYES. Madam Speaker, this has been a remarkable day in Iraq, and I would like to redirect our attention for a moment to the things that Mr. OSBORNE outlined. Remarkable, the accomplishments of Iraqi people today. More than 70 percent of their population went to the polls and exercised the right that they have never had before, the right to vote for a democratic government. That vote was courageous. It showed commitment. It showed the resolve of the Iraqi people to take control of their destiny and their future. It was a tremendous step forward for peace, stability in the future of freedom in the Middle East. So I would like to take a part of my time to salute and to call attention to the incredible things that the Iraqis have done today and have committed themselves to do in the future by voting for a free Iraq.

But more especially, Madam Speaker, I would like to call attention to the men and women in uniform from America and around the globe in the coalition forces, but especially tonight the American men and women who have made this election possible, who have spoken out, who have given, in many cases, their lives so that Iraqi men and women could vote today and determine their own future.

My most sincere thanks and the thanks of a grateful Nation is extended from every quarter today to these men and women who have performed so courageously and so remarkably and have made this day and this election possible. I do not know how we can thank them enough, but it is a privilege for me to stand before the people's House and call attention to these wonderful men and women who represent America and all we stand for: freedom, democracy, equal opportunity.

They did it today. What a tribute to them, but especially a tribute to their

families, the moms and dads, wives and husbands of those soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines whose lives have been lost in the quest for freedom for people around the world.

So as I close, Madam Speaker, thank you for allowing me to speak tonight on behalf of myself, the Eighth Congressional District of North Carolina, the home of Fort Bragg, the 18th Airborne Corps, the 82nd Airborne Division, and all the men and women in uniform. God has blessed America so richly by giving us these men and women who have stood and fought and won for democracy.

God bless them all.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFazio) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFazio addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

IRAQI ELECTIONS

Ms. WOOLSEY. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak out of order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Madam Speaker, with the holidays upon us, some Members of this body have been working really hard to divert attention from much of the pressing issues that we should be working on in this Congress. They have been doing this by complaining about some kind of war on Christmas.

You can always tell when their poll numbers are down. That is when they reach into their bag of culture war tricks and gin up a divisive controversy that has nothing to do with Americans' real challenges and Americans' real aspirations. It is really interesting, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are very interested in preserving the symbols of Christmas. But the war they are supporting and the budgets they are passing, more Scrooge than Santa, demonstrate that they have forgotten the true meaning of Christmas, particularly the part about peace on Earth and goodwill towards all.

Besides, how many casualties have there been in this so-called war on Christmas? Here is a hint. Several thousand less than the war on Iraq. Today, without a doubt, we should congratulate the Iraqi people for what appears to be a successful, high turnout election. For the third time this year, courageous Iraqi citizens have enthusiastically exercised their democratic rights.

But successful elections do not, and cannot, obscure the devastating na-

tional tragedy that is the Iraq war. It does not change the fact that over 2,100 Americans have died for weapons of mass destruction that never existed. It does not change the fact that this war has turned Iraq into a hotbed of terrorist activity. It does not change the fact that our troops are sitting ducks for the insurgents who have been emboldened, not deterred, by our military presence in Iraq.

Now that the elections are over, the question is, What now? What next in terms of U.S. policy towards Iraq? Aside from trying to spin it and take credit for it, what is the President's reaction to this Iraqi election? All indications are that even with a modest reduction in troops, he will insist that we must stay the course. That means continuing with this bloody occupation that has killed or maimed thousands of our people, has cost us hundreds of billions of dollars and turned the entire world against us. Furthermore, he will not see the irony in celebrating Iraqi democracy while we use United States taxpayer money to manufacture propaganda and spread it in the Iraqi press. He will ignore the contradiction in praising Iraqi freedom while violating civil liberties at home by pushing for a more heavy-handed and invasive sequel to the PATRIOT Act.

Here is the bottom line: a successful Iraqi election should, at the very least, reinforce the imperative of bringing our troops home. If Iraq is truly able to self-govern, then we have no business occupying their country and meddling in their affairs.

I have argued all year long that it is time to restore Iraqi sovereignty and give Iraq back to the Iraqi people. If the election is a watershed moment, as the White House claims, then what is the continued justification for having our troops over there in harm's way?

Now is the time to enlist the support of the international community to establish an interim security force for Iraq. But that is just the first step. As I have written to the President in a letter signed by 61 other Members of the House, the United States must also launch a diplomatic offensive recasting our role in Iraq as a reconstruction partner, rather than a military occupier.

We must also lead the way in establishing an international peace commission to oversee the post-war reconciliation and coordinate peace talks between Iraq's various factions.

Madam Speaker, sometimes it seems like the only people who still support this war work in the big white building down Pennsylvania Avenue. There is barely any constituency left for our Iraq policy. The majority of the American people are not behind it; our global allies are not behind it. The Iraqi people are not behind it. Even Iraqi leaders, Sunnis, Shiites and Kurdish alike, who agree on practically nothing, have united around the call for the United States military to leave. With the Iraqi people having voted once